

# BOYS' LIFE

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JANUARY 1973

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a lot more  
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# The Center of Attention

By JACK RITCHIE



He zigged when he should have zagged and we meshed.

**B**asketball is getting to be a big thing in Europe—even in Liechtenstein—and so Herr Brunner was really happy to see me report for practice.

He's a big man with a black mustache and he's head coach at this Gymnasium—which is what they call a high school in Liechtenstein. He looked me over and smiled. "Hogan, you have considerable height. Undoubtedly you are the product of selective breeding?"

He meant were my folks tall, which is true.

This student exchange thing started some time back and nobody seems to remember who's responsible, but what happens is that Stevenson High, back in the States, trades one student with Liechtenstein each year and this time I was the one who got tapped on the shoulder by the Selection Committee.

Liechtenstein is about 62 square miles, give or take a mountain, and the last time it got excited enough to join anybody in a war was over 100 years ago and even then it arrived late and got turned down.

"How long have you had a basketball team?" I asked.

"Nearly one complete month," Coach Brunner said. "Actually we are so newly organized that we have no opponents as yet. However, I have advertised in a Swiss newspaper and this should soon be rectified."

There were about 20 kids out there on the floor trying to make the team. A month ago none of them had ever seen a basketball and it showed. Not that they weren't trying hard. But I guess you've got to start handling a basketball long before you reach high school to really get the feel of it.

At the end of my first practice session, Coach Brunner nodded approvingly. "You are extremely adept, Hogan. Undoubtedly in the United States you were a star player?"

I bounced the ball on the floor a couple of times. "I had my moments." And then I guess I blushed.

Actually, back home I was a substitute and pretty much rear rank at that. The only time I ever got sent into a

game was when Stevenson High was 15 points ahead with two minutes to play.

But I didn't see any point in bringing that up right now. I mean everything's comparative and if I looked good here, why rock the boat?

The next afternoon, Coach Brunner showed up waving a letter. "I have here a challenge from a private Gymnasium in Berne. By an incredible coincidence, it is from little Heinz."

"You, Hogan, are my secret weapon. With your height and your considerable skill at the position of center, I am certain we will demolish little Heinz and his Swiss invaders."

I had the impulse to cheer, but I held it down.

Arrangements were made with little Heinz and on the night of the game, I looked over the Berne team as it filed out of its locker room. It seemed to me that we had a slight height advantage,

To be or not to be a hero, that is this hero's problem.



"Hogan, I wish you to vacate the premises."

So who's little Heinz? I wondered.

He explained for the benefit of everybody. "Little Heinz and I were classmates in this very Gymnasium. He has since migrated to Switzerland for reasons of employment, though naturally, for tax purposes, he still retains his Liechtenstein citizenship." He smiled to himself. "Ah, little Heinz was always a sharp one, even as a schoolboy."

His eyes went back to the letter. "Little Heinz says that he too has organized a basketball team and it has been in existence for more than one year. This perhaps puts us at a disadvantage, but I am not discouraged." He looked my way and smiled.

except for one kid on the Swiss team. He was about as tall as I am.

Brunner looked a little worried, but then he shrugged. "So one of his players too has height. But he cannot possibly match your skill in only one year of practice."

Little Heinz turned out to be about five foot two and he had red hair. He came over and shook hands with Brunner. "We are here to do our feeble best." He looked at me suspiciously. "He is a tall one, no?"

Brunner acted as though he'd never seen me before in his life. "This one? Our center? He does have height. I will say at least this much for him. He →



## How many points does a man need to make him happy?

has been with us less than one month."

A smile came to Heinz's face. "Perhaps we could make a small wager on the outcome of this game?"

"No," Brunner said firmly. "I would lose my amateur standing."

Little Heinz seemed disappointed, but then he brightened. "Not for money, of course. I would never even think of this. But for something else. Just to make things more interesting." He seemed to think for a while and then he snapped his fin-

gers. "Your magnificent mustache, perhaps?"

Brunner's hand went protectively to the article in question. Then he frowned. "You have always envied me my mustache, have you not? In your own attempts to achieve one, it results in a little red, a little black, and a little brown?"

Heinz nodded sadly. "And perhaps today, also a little to gray." He pulled himself together. "If your team loses, you will shave off your mustache. And if my team loses, I will grow one. Surely you

must have some confidence in your team?"

Brunner looked around at all of us who were listening hard and then realized he couldn't back down. "Very well, Heinz, so be it. My mustache, which exists, against yours, which does not."

After Heinz went back to his team, one of the officials handed Brunner a copy of the Berne line-up.

Brunner blinked as he read it. "Maglio, Harrington, Maddigan, Bryan, and Reilly? This is the Swiss team?"



"You were magnificent," Coach Brunner said, "and you must continue. My mustache is in your hands."

He rubbed the back of his neck. "Maglio probably comes from one of the Italian cantons of Switzerland. But Harrington, Maddigan, Bryan, and Reilly?" He looked at me for help.

I couldn't give him any.

His face darkened. "Little Heinz has stacked his team with four Americans. This points to disaster."

I couldn't argue with that, but I tried to cheer him up. "Back home, we never say die. That's the American Way."

Brunner nodded. "It is

also the Liechtenstein Way, though we have never set it to music." He took a deep breath and spoke to the team. "Do not despair. Our opponents are not supermen. They are but human and enter their lederhosen one leg at a time."

When our team went out onto the floor, I used my best Liechtenstein-German to ask Maglio what canton he came from.

"Chicago," he said.

And so the game started.

But after a couple of minutes, I realized that things

weren't going to be as bad as I thought.

What I mean is that here Berne also had Harrington, Maddigan, Bryan, and Reilly, but the four of them weren't much better—or worse—than our own Schoff, Diehl, Kohl, and Meunch. They kept bumping into each other a lot, too, and lost the ball just about as often as we did.

When the first quarter ended, the score stood at 24

to 22 in our favor, and the interesting thing was

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## The Center

→(Continued from page 39)

that I scored 23 of our 24 points.

Coach Brunner was both happy and worried by our two-

point lead. He patted me on the back. "You were magnificent and you must continue this. My mustache is in your hands."

That got me to thinking. Twenty-three points in just one

quarter? I'd never scored that much in a whole season before.

Man, at that rate I could collect 92 points in the whole game.

That ought to be some kind

of a European record. Maybe even American? It ought to make the papers back home. Coach Richardson at Stevenson High might even decide that I really belonged on the first team after all. And he wouldn't keep forgetting my name.

I looked across the court at Maglio and saw that he had a dreamy expression on his face.

I suddenly realized that he could be thinking something along that line himself. He'd scored every one of his team's 22 points.

In the first four minutes of the second quarter, I dumped in three field goals. The only trouble was that Maglio kept pace and then some. He also racked up three field goals, plus one free throw.

It was going to be hard to keep ahead of him, what with his team feeding him the ball all the time.

On a missed pass, Schoff, one of our forwards, got the ball and brought it down near the Berne free-throw circle.

He took a shot and missed.

I shook my head. "I was open, Schoff. You should have passed off to me."

He glanced at the ceiling. "I was much closer to the basket and also in a more favorable position. You were to one side near the boundary of the court."

"Maybe," I said. "But I'm pretty good with sideline shots, and besides, you missed. We'd like to win this one, Schoff."

His eyes went to the ceiling again. "It had almost



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slipped my mind," he declared.

At the end of the half, the score stood at 53 to 51, still in our favor. I had scored 49 of our points and Maglio 47 of his team's 51.

Coach Brunner patted me on the back again. "You are unquestionably the most outstanding player on the court. By at least two points."

He frowned at Schoff. "How many shots did you miss in this second quarter?" he asked.

Schoff swallowed. "Just one, sir. It was the only one I took."

Brunner turned to Diehl. "And how many shots did you take at the basket without success?"

"None, sir. I swear to this." Diehl looked up at the ceiling. "There was one free throw, but this was forced upon me by the officials," he said.

What was up there anyway? I looked at the ceiling too and saw nothing but the sky-lights and pulled-up climbing ropes.

"Gentlemen," Brunner announced. "From now on there will be absolutely no free-lancing. When one of you gains possession of the ball, he will pass it immediately to Hogan, so that he can make the score. It is through his excellence alone that we are winning the game."

I felt my face getting red, but not out of modesty.

All this time I'd been seeing Maglio getting the ball fed to him and not noticing—or wanting to notice—that the same thing was happening to me.

I closed my eyes. Here I came from the land of sportsmanship and I was

hogging the ball just as bad as Maglio.

Something had to be done—world record in sight or no world record. I had to give the game back to the rest of the

team and let them play—win, lose, or draw—though win or draw was a wild thought. Maglio was too good for them.

I would ask Coach Brunner to take me out of the game.

I looked at him and his mustache, and I winced.

No. I had that much sportsmanship, but not that much courage. I had to get out (Continued on page 59) →

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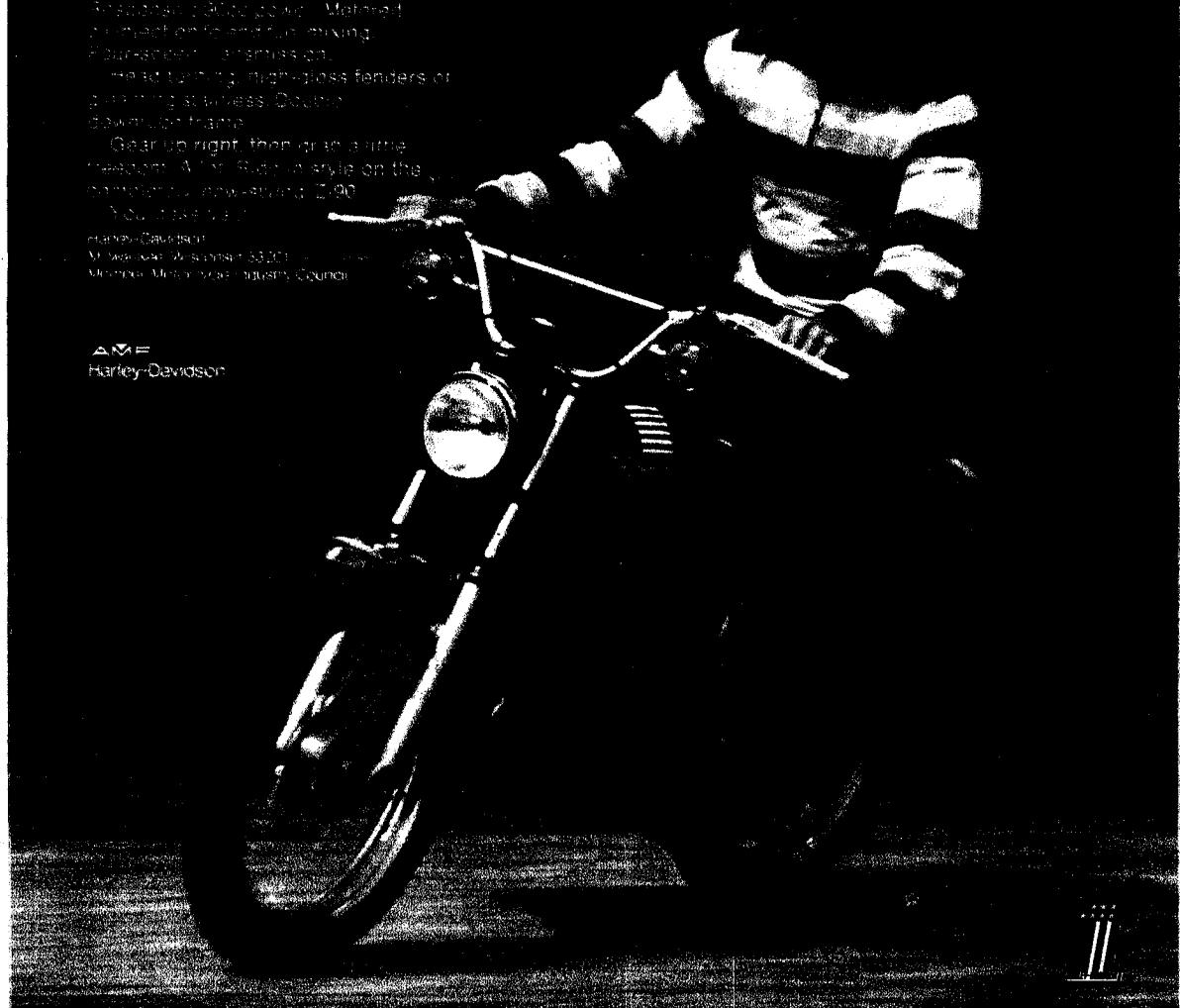
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## The Center

→ (Continued from page 53)

of the game some other way.

Fake an injury?

No. I wasn't much of a method actor. Back home I had a one-line part in a school play and fluffed that.

Foul out?

That was more like it. I already had one personal and if I set my mind to it, it shouldn't be too hard to get four more and be booted out of the game.

When the second-half whistle blew, I was out there with a dedicated smile on my face.

Diehl got the center tap, slow dribbled three steps, and then passed off to me.

I went straight down the court for the basket, but at the last second, I turned off slightly, heading for Maglio.

What I had in mind was to bump him just enough to earn a foul for charging. But he zipped when he should have zagged and we came together hard enough to spill us both on the floor.

He sat there looking a little bit bewildered.

I helped him to his feet and he got a sudden pained expression on his face.

Was he hurt? I hoped not.

I turned to the referee. "It was my fault. I was charging," I told him.

Maglio seemed to be studying the floor. "No, it was my fault. I got in his way."

"Now, Maglio," I said, "I know when I'm charging and I was charging."

But the referee disagreed with me

and pinned the foul on Maglio.

When the Berne team got the ball again, Harrington, as usual, passed off to Maglio. He came dribbling in my direction and I closed in, figuring to hack at his

arm just enough so that this time I would collect the foul.

But the way it turned out was that Maglio lurched into me before I could hack him and he was handed another foul.

What was he trying to do?  
Foul out of the game too?

Maglio called time out and went to the sidelines to speak to little Heinz.

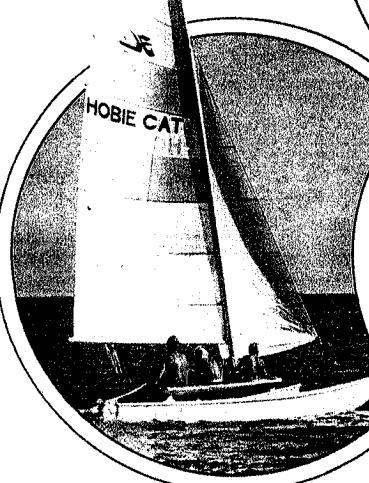
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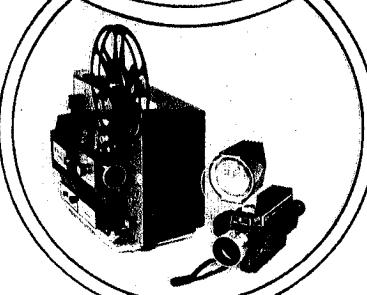


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## The Center

→ (Continued from page 59)

I took the break to get a drink of water on our side of the floor.

Maglio and little Heinz seemed to be in a conference. Finally Heinz nodded and Maglio trotted down the sidelines and into the locker room. It looked like he wasn't coming back because Heinz sent a substitute out onto the floor.

Coach Brunner frowned. "Heinz sends away his best man? I do not understand what is going on there."

I didn't either, but I cleared my throat. "I wouldn't exactly like to put it in writing, but it's just remotely possible that little Heinz is trying to pull off sportsmanship."

"Sportsmanship?" he asked.

I nodded. "Maglio's been hogging the ball the whole game and so it's obvious that nobody else on the Berne team is having any good clean fun. I'm just guessing, of course, but it's conceivable that little Heinz is trying to give the game back to the team."

Brunner let that sink in. "But why should little Heinz indulge in sportsmanship? It is not his nature."

I looked at the skylight for help and got it. "He might be trying for the Sportsmanship Trophy."

"Sportsmanship Trophy? What Sportsmanship Trophy?"

I sipped some water from the cup. "In the United States, we're always awarding Sportsmanship Trophies. Lots of times they go to coaches."

Brunner looked interested. "But who awards this trophy?"

"The game officials, I guess. When there is a trophy."

He touched his mustache tenderly for a moment and then studied me. "It pains me to mention this, Hogan, but when one speaks of ball-hogging, I believe that I have observed something of this in your own conduct on the floor."

I let my mouth drop. "Me? Ball-hogging?"

He glared for a second across the court at Heinz. "So little Heinz wishes to meddle with sportsmanship? Well, two can play this game as well as one." He turned back to me. "Hogan, as of this moment, you are out of the game."

"Aw!" I said.

He nodded. "I am sorry, but

such is life and one must mature." He pointed toward the exit. "Go, Hogan, I wish you to vacate the premises as Maglio has done."

I took a fast shower and dressed. As I was leaving the building I almost bumped into Maglio coming in.

He seemed surprised to see me. "Is the game over already?"

"No," I said. "It's still in the third quarter."

He was a little out of breath. "I lost one of my contact lenses the first time we collided out there. And to make things worse, I accidentally stepped on it when you helped me to my feet. I thought maybe I could

play without it, but it was no go."

So that explained why he'd lurched into me the second time.

He started taking off his jacket. "Luckily I had a spare in my luggage at the hotel. I decided to go for it myself. You know how it is when you send anybody else. They'd never find anything that small."

He was about to pass me.

I smiled quickly. "I just got to shake your hand."

He backed off a little. "What for?"

"For your sportsmanship," I said. "The way you took yourself voluntarily →

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out of the game when you realized that you were hogging the ball."

His eyes narrowed. "You think I took myself out of the game?"

"It was big of you to give the game back to the team," I said. "Really big."

He frowned as he thought that over. "How come you're out of the game?"

I scuffed a foot on the floor. "When I saw what you'd done, I just had to follow your example," I told him.

I looked back toward the court. "So you came back to watch them play?" I smiled understandingly. "That was my idea too. To watch them play. But then I decided that even the sight of me in the stands might somehow make my teammates feel guilty. You know how it is when you do a whole team a favor?"

He chewed on his lower lip as he gave it more thought.

"There's a place just down the road that serves wonderful pizza," I said.

He sighed. "Can't stand pizza. But maybe we can find a place where they sell ice cream."

I didn't see Coach Brunner

again until the next morning. He was clean-shaven.

He looked at me accusingly. "There was no trophy."

I cleared my throat. "That happens sometimes. What was the final score?"

"55 to 54."

It had been 51 to 49 when I left the game at the beginning of the third quarter. "You mean that in almost an entire half, both teams together scored only nine points?"

He nodded. "In its own way, it was a thing of beauty."

I shook my head. "It's still a

little hard to believe that all those Americans couldn't do any better."

"But Harrington, Bryan, Reilly, and Maddigan are not Americans."

I blinked. "What else could they be?"

"I learned after the game that they are exchange students from Dublin. This is in Ireland. And basketball is obviously not their national game."

I digested that. "Well, anyway we lost by only one point."

He smiled broadly. "Lost? But we won by this one point."

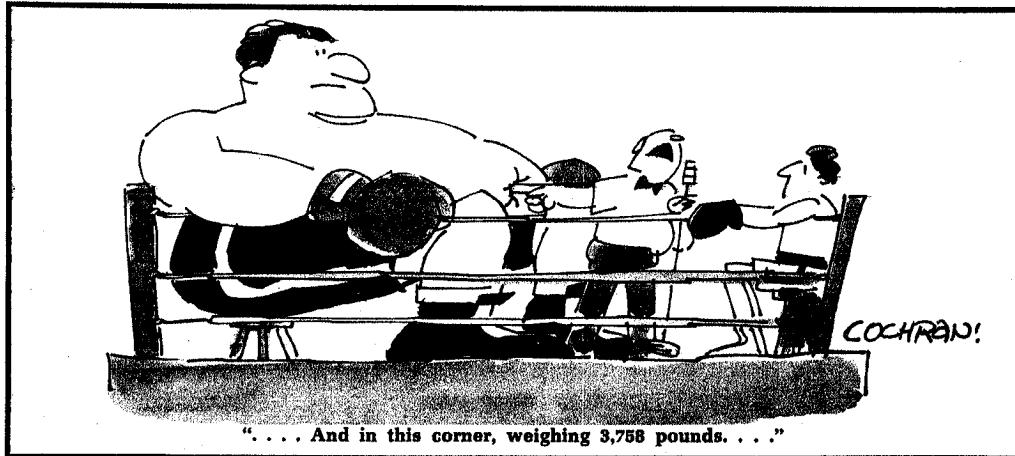
I stared. "But the mustache?"

"An impulse. This morning as I was shaving the other parts of my face, I suddenly realized that I had not seen my upper lip since my nineteenth birthday. And in a moment, it was done."

The next time I came across a mirror, I stopped and looked at myself. I wondered how I would look if I raised a—

I sighed. No. The Student Council here has put together a Dress and Appearance Code.

I'd have to settle for long sideburns.



Catch any big ones this year? Send us a color snapshot along with your name, address, age, and waters where fish were caught. Who knows? You might see yourself in our next Zebco album of great fish.



Gary Von Bergen, Age 18  
Largemouth Bass, 4 lb. 10 oz.  
Strip Mine, Wilmington, Illinois



Charlie Roberts, Age 9  
Largemouth Bass, 4 lb. 2 oz.  
Shell Creek, Oklahoma



Tom Brachmann, Age 14  
Rainbow Trout, 5 lb. 4 oz.  
Pigeon River, Wisconsin

**ZEBCO**

Reels and rods worthy of great fish.